I have been reading lately about resilience and what it takes to live in a changing world. As we approach the waning of COVID’s intensity, there is quite a bit of talk emerging about navigating the new normal. We may not know exactly what that new normal will look or feel like – and we may not for some time yet – but it seems to me that we are living with a high index of uncertainty and, in some cases, trepidation.

How does one successfully move through and beyond such a prolonged period of uncertainty as we have experienced with the pandemic? We need to use much energy just to get through each day. But we also need to be prepared for that future ‘new normal’ when it arrives. How do we manage all that? How do we balance keeping our daily lives going and being future-facing when we are so tired? How do we find the motivation to influence what that new normal will look like rather than just waiting for it?

There is really quite a bit of ‘advice’ in the evidence on coping with adversity that could shed some light on answers to these questions. I thought I might highlight some of this information for your consideration.

The first idea is to be aware of where you are personally and collectively. Understanding the situation and the surrounding environment, and how you are thinking and feeling about it, gives a context for perceiving what is in your control, what you can do something about, and what is beyond your control. Providing this understanding is based on correct and relevant information, gaining insight into what is controllable can be useful for focusing your efforts.

The second idea is to pay attention to oneself and ensure you are ‘the best you can be’. This is where resilience comes into the equation. Resilience has to do with flexibility and ‘bouncing back’, having the capacity to adapt successfully to difficult or challenging life experiences by using mental, emotional, and behavioural resources and skills. Honing these resources and skills can make a difference in coping with difficult situations. These include practicing a healthy lifestyle, maintaining work/life balance, embracing healthy thoughts, avoiding negative outlets, committing to a purpose, being a life-long learner, building connections with others, and seeking help when you need it. All have been shown to be helpful approaches. Taking control of what you can control is an important step.

The third idea emerges from the evidence about connections, linking with others and finding support. According to research by Dr Michael Ungar, a psychologist at Dalhousie University in Halifax, the support you receive and the resources it offers are, in some ways, more important than your individual personal capacities. Despite having personal drive and determination, individuals who succeed are those who have a community of supports and access to social resources. Research has shown that success in coping with adversity is associated with the relationships we are in, followed by workplace safety, security in where we live, good employment, and training opportunities. This evidence ought to push us to ensure the new normal in our social and workplace policies facilitates building strong communities and effective collaboration within our work teams.

The fourth idea is about actively working to craft the future. It is about forging the new normal and intentionally influencing what it will look like. In our case, as oncology nurses, we must work to ensure how the new normal will benefit patients, families, and our working environment. Having a vision and being committed to that vision through action builds resilience at an individual level, but also helps to foster an improved future. What I see, in all I have read, supports the notion that influencing the future requires innovation, creativity, courage, perseverance, and collaboration. And, it will require working together with patience, compassion, and acknowledgement of the vulnerability in ourselves and others.

The future in cancer care requires a paradigm shift, if we are to see a more person-oriented system and manage the challenges left by the pandemic. I believe oncology nurses can have a significant influence on future cancer care. They have a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience. Now is not the time to sit back and wait for others to craft the changes. Now is the time for stepping up, speaking out, and being involved. Now is the time to shape what will be.

Coping with adversity is challenging. We can begin to surmount the challenge by looking after our own physical and mental health and by taking steps to reach out and connect with others. We are social beings and require interaction with others. Now is the time to push us to ensure the new normal in our social and workplace policies facilitates building strong communities and effective collaboration within our work teams.

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REFERENCE